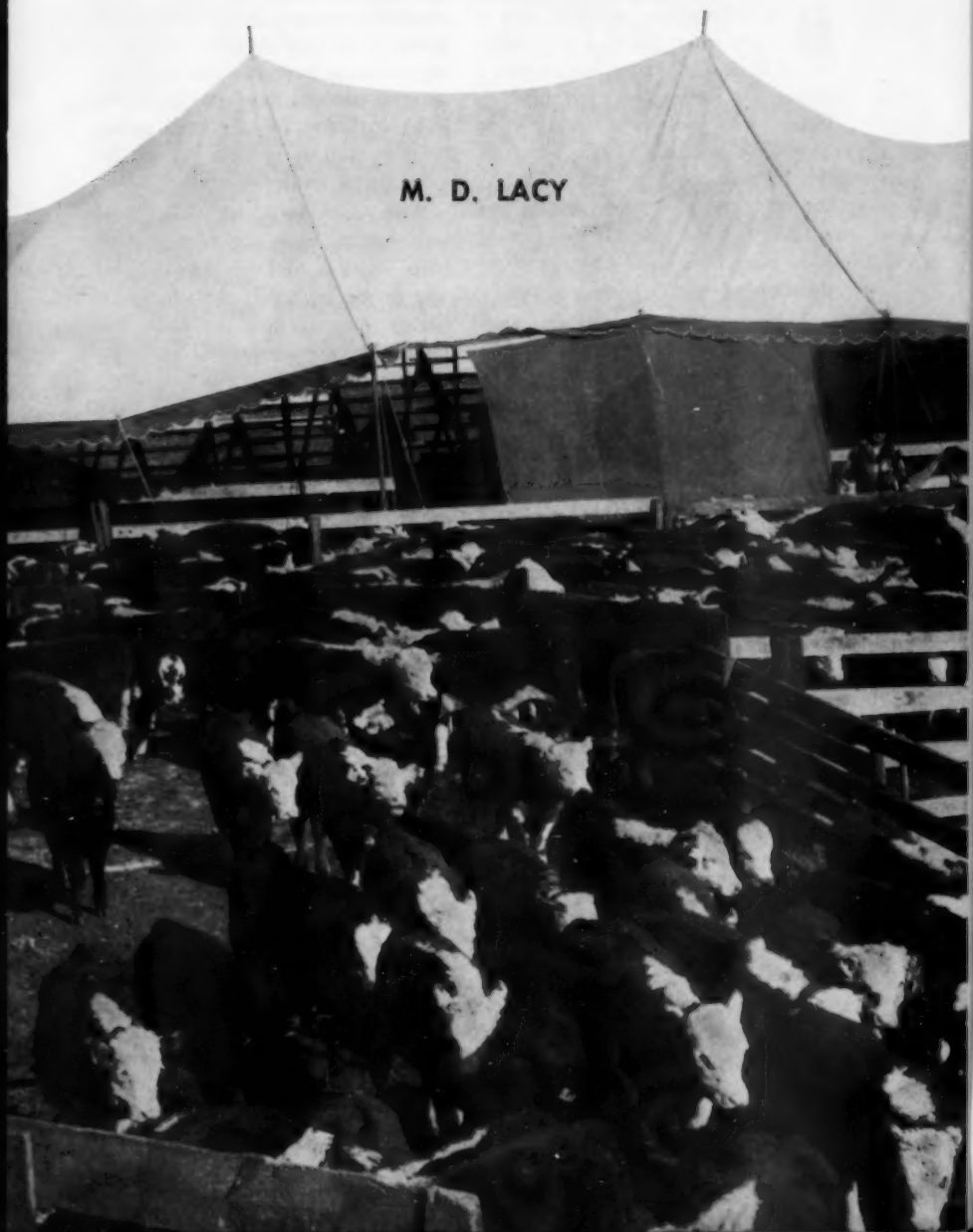


# Beef Production

## IN NEW YORK STATE

M. D. LACY



# Beef Production in New York State

By M. D. LACY

**B**EEF production, although not a major enterprise on a large number of New York farms, has increased during the forties and early fifties—from 7,000 beef cows in 1940 to 25,000 on January 1, 1953. Much of this increase can be attributed to: (1) the rising price of cattle during this period; (2) the shortage and cost of good farm labor; and (3) the diversification of the farming program.

There is a place for further expansion of beef production in New York State for several reasons: (1) New York farmers can grow an abundance of grass, hay, and silage; (2) there is an adequate water supply on most farm lands; (3) beef production demands little labor; (4) fits well as a companion program into many of the other farming programs and thus helps to balance the labor load; (5) helps to maintain or increase soil fertility; (6) does not necessitate a large investment in buildings and equipment; (7) makes a market for low-quality roughage that might otherwise be wasted; (8) diversifies the farming program; and (9) is a way to utilize low-cost land.

## Companion Program

**N**EW YORK farms, generally speaking, are rather small—an average of 128 acres. Consequently beef production, because it requires little labor usually fits best into the farming operation as a companion or

part-time program. A number of fruit growers, cash-crop farmers, and poultry producers have found a beef program to combine satisfactorily. Cattle make a market for the home-grown feeds as well as to help balance the labor supply on these farms.

Some dairymen, particularly those with two or more sets of buildings, have found a beef program a good way to market some of their lower-quality roughage on the farm that might otherwise be wasted.

Some city workers, who live in the country on small farms or acreages, have found that a few beef cattle can be a good way to market pasture and hay with little or no extra labor.

## Size of Enterprise

**O**N MOST farms, the size of the beef program should be determined primarily by the amount of feed produced on the farm that will be marketed through beef cattle.

A beef program combined with other farming enterprises may range from feeding only a few steers to keeping several hundred cows or feeding large numbers of cattle. Breeding herds of less than 10 to 15 cows are usually not practical. If a major part of the farm income is to come from selling feeder calves at weaning time, a herd of 50 or more cows is recommended. If the calves are to be finished for market, fewer might be kept.

A survey of purebred and commer-

cial herds in central and western New York in 1951, conducted by the Department of Agricultural Economics at Cornell University, showed that the labor returns in herds averaging 32 brood cows returned more than twice as much per hour of labor as did herds averaging 10 cows—\$4.82 as compared with \$2.06.

High-quality registered cow herds of 25 to 35 cows are practical on many farms. These are often referred to as "one-sire herds." A larger unit is preferable if the farm is large enough.

#### Areas Suited to Beef Production

ANY farm in New York State that will profitably grow an abundance of grass and hay can be used for the production of beef. Grain production, for most beef programs, is also desired but not a necessity.

The areas of the State where many of the beef cattle are now raised and sections that seem to be well suited for beef raising are the cash-crop and fruit regions of central and western New York. More and more farmers in the southern-tier counties in the State are finding commercial cow and calf programs a practical enterprise.

Many of the state's top purebred herds are in the lower Hudson Valley. Dutchess County has long been recognized as one of the largest producing counties of high-quality Aberdeen Angus cattle in the United States.

#### Returns

RETURNS from beef cattle vary considerably, depending upon price of beef cattle, type of beef enter-

prise, efficiency of the program, and many other factors.

In the study made by the Department of Agricultural Economics of 39 beef-production operations in central and western New York in 1951, the net return per hour of labor was \$3.41. The net profit per brood cow was \$80. One should keep in mind that 1951 was a good year for the beef producer. When based on ten-year average conditions (1941-1950), the return was \$1.06 per hour, or comparable to the return (\$1.00) found in the study made by the Departments of Animal Husbandry and Agricultural Economics in 1940-41.

One must keep in mind that beef production is not a program of marketing large amounts of labor, on the contrary it is a low-labor program. In the 1951 study, the average labor requirements were 629 hours for a 20-brood cow herd. These figures are based on commercial and semi-commercial herds. High-quality purebred herds representing larger investments in breeding stock and the like would show a larger labor requirement and consequently a greater return.

A study of beef costs and returns in northeastern Michigan from 1946 to 1950 inclusive showed a net return of \$42.61 per cow. The average size of the cow herd was 29. The program was a commercial enterprise and similar to many of the commercial programs that are and could be used in New York State.

Approximately 420 steers on feeding experiments at Cornell University from 1944 to 1951 averaged \$45.75 per head above steer and feed costs.

Most of the experiments had to do with the utilization of a maximum of roughage in the ration and only enough grain to bring the steers to a good-to-choice slaughter grade.

### Types of Programs

**T**HERE is no one "best" system of beef production. The program selected should depend upon: (1) crops produced on the farm that will be marketed through beef cattle; (2) type of labor available; (3) capital available for investments; and, (4) location of the farm.

Beef programs in New York State can be grouped, generally speaking, into three classifications, namely, (1) commercial or grade herds; (2) purebred breeding establishments; and, (3) cattle-feeding operations. Often farmers combine more than one of these programs on the same farm.

### Commercial or grade herd

A commercial or grade herd is the least intensive of the beef programs and one that makes it possible to utilize a maximum of roughage with a minimum of grain. In fact, the small grain produced in the normal rotation on the average New York farm supplies enough grain for this kind of program if the calves are sold as feeders at weaning time.

If the calves are to be fattened for market, the cropping program might include: from 35 to 50 per cent pasture; 40 per cent harvested roughage; and from 10 to 25 per cent grain (mostly corn).

Commercial producers are finding a ready market for feeder calves in

the State. Many calves are sold through the feeder-calf sales. More acres of New York land could be put to good use with a feeder-calf production program.

### Purebred breeding herd

A purebred breeding herd necessitates more capital, more experienced labor, and usually more grain than a commercial cow-and-calf program. The purebred breeder also needs to be a good salesman, have attractive but not necessarily expensive buildings, and put more emphasis on breeding programs than does the commercial cow man. Consequently, the purebred breeder has a more intensive program and has an opportunity to receive a larger return per unit than his commercial friend.

Purebred breeders can be subdivided as: (1) those owning the so-called "name" herds or those with national reputation for quality and breeding; (2) the average breeder who sells a majority of his cattle for breeding; and, (3) those who have registered cow herds but market only a few for breeding, with the majority going into the feed lot or sold as feeders.

### Cattle feeding

Cattle feeding has certain advantages over a breeding program, namely: (1) no breeding problems; (2) quick turnover; (3) easy-to-adjust numbers to the feed supply; (4) cattle young, growing, and usually increasing in value; and (5) arrangement of the program to necessitate less shelter and equipment than a breeding herd.

Some disadvantages that may or may not offset the advantages are: (1) more financial risk involved; (2) the temptation to be an "in-and-outer"; (3) need of high-quality feeds at all times for best results; and (4) possibly a considerable outlay of cash to purchase cattle annually.

The safest cattle-feeding program in New York State is to purchase in the fall "good to choice" feeder calves that weigh from 350 to 550 pounds; to winter them on good-quality hay, silage, and from 2 to 3 pounds of grain per head daily; to turn the cattle to grass in the spring and full-feed them in dry lot for 90 to 100 days following the grazing season. If one wishes to market the cattle in late summer or early fall, he may feed grain during the grazing season and market the cattle following only a few weeks of feeding in dry lot. Either program should about double the purchased weight with a maximum of roughage and a minimum of grain to get the cattle into the choice slaughter grade.

Farmers who produce a considerable amount of corn may want to purchase calves in the fall and full-feed them until they are marketed the following summer. With such a program the farmer can market from 800- to 1000-pound cattle that grade prime and bring top market prices.

Usually there is much more risk in buying heavy feeder cattle than purchasing light-weight feeders. Producers who are new in the cattle business should reduce as much of the risk as is possible.

Buying feeders in the spring and

selling off grass in the fall without grain is usually not a profitable program. Good-to-choice feeder cattle should be fed a minimum of 1200 to 1500 pounds of grain before they are marketed.

### Choosing the Breed

THE choice of a breed is not too important to the New York farmer. Aberdeen Angus, Hereford, and Shorthorn cattle are well adapted to this area. There is more variation within than between these breeds. The important point is to get *good* cattle in the breed chosen.

The choice should be based primarily upon the preference or liking one has for a particular breed. A breeder will be much happier and do a better job with a breed he or she likes. With no preference, it is usually best for the farmer to choose the breed most popular in the local community. Then he can observe the methods used by other breeders and cooperate in a good selling program.

### Quality Livestock

A good cattleman once said, "A farmer can feed anything he can buy cheap enough, but can only afford to breed the best." There is much truth in this statement. It costs about as much to produce low-quality cattle as good ones. Farmers who plan to start purebred breeding herds should begin with good-quality breeding stock that has acceptable blood lines. A commercial man should never start with heifers that grade below "good" in the feeder grade. Choice



Good-quality breeding stock and good pastures are essential for a successful cow and calf program

heifers are preferred. The use of a good bull is the quickest way to improve the herd.

Farmers who buy feeders usually find that it pays to feed the better-quality feeder cattle—particularly if much grain is to be fed. Good-to-choice feeder calves purchased in the fall are usually the best buy. Lower-quality feeder cattle should be purchased only when they can be obtained at considerably lower prices than those for better quality cattle and when cheap feeds, such as roughages, are to be fed as the principal source of nutrients.

#### Feeds for Beef Cattle

**F**ARMERS should grow most of the feeds used in their beef program. The survey conducted by the Depart-

ment of Agricultural Economics in 1951 showed that 98 per cent of the feeds used by the farmers they surveyed were home-grown. About the only feeds that need to be purchased are protein supplements and minerals.

A good pasture program is the most important single crop in a good beef program. Silages are important but not a necessity. Farm grains, particularly corn and oats, are needed in a majority of cattle-feeding programs. These feeds should be produced on the farm where grain production is practical.

Mature brood cows can be wintered on hay and silage or hay alone. Grain is usually not needed for the mature breeding herd except for the herd bull or cows nursing fall calves.

Heifer calves, particularly those in purebred breeding herds, should be wintered well the first year. That is a good time to invest some feed in the future brood cow.

The young cattle should get the best of the hay crop available for beef cattle on the farm. The older cattle utilize the coarser roughages best.

### Housing and Equipment

**H**OUSING for beef cattle need not be elaborate nor expensive. Three-sided open sheds that protect the cattle from rain, wind, and snow and provide a dry place for them to bed down are satisfactory. Beef cattle should never be stanchioned or shut in tight barns. Free access to well-drained yards is best.

Pole barns are inexpensive and make excellent housing for beef cattle. The purebred breeder who sells high-quality breeding stock will probably want to invest a little more in

buildings than will the commercial breeder. A show barn may be needed as well as somewhat more buildings in general.

Each cow needs at least 50 square feet of shelter, yearlings need 40 square feet, and weaned calves need 30 square feet. Cattle that are to be fed hay or silage under the shelter, need more space—possibly from 60 to 75 square feet per cow and a little more for younger cattle than that stated above.

Earthen floors are not only satisfactory but usually desired under sheds. Paving may be needed in yards that are not well drained and become muddy.

Feed bunks and hay racks should be constructed and placed so that the cattle can be fed with a minimum of labor. Feeding "outside" is quite satisfactory during the winter months—particularly hay or silage. With this arrangement less bedding is needed

Beef cattle are hardy and should not be confined to "tight" barns during the winter months



than where the cattle are fed inside the building because the cows are out of the sheds more.

A well-built chute with a head gate is one of the "must" pieces of equipment on a beef-cattle farm. The chute should be from 24 to 28 inches wide (inside measurements) and at least 10 feet long—from 15 to 30 feet is better. Some farmers prefer a shorter chute that is portable and can be moved about.

A cattle stock is a valuable piece of equipment on farms that fit cattle for shows and sales. Loading chutes and scales are needed on livestock farms.

### **Marketing**

#### **Slaughter cattle**

Marketing cattle for slaughter is somewhat of a problem to beef producers who live in areas where cattle numbers are small. Good markets are built on regular volume that assures the buyer of a constant supply.

The market situation for slaughter cattle in New York State, however, has definitely improved during the early nineteen fifties. Several auction markets in the State get satisfactory prices for beef cattle. Terminal markets, local butchers, and individual freezer-locker trade also provide a good market for slaughter cattle.

#### **Feeder cattle**

Feeder-calf sales in the fall provide

an excellent outlet for the commercial cow and calf man. These sales also make a good place to purchase a few feeder calves and an opportunity to purchase replacement heifers for commercial herds or for stock with which to start a beef program. Previous to the sale, all the calves are individually weighed and graded, and sorted into uniform pens according to breed, sex, weight, and grade.

Farmers who wish to get feeder cattle from the cattle ranges usually find it best to purchase them through a reliable local commission merchant.

#### **Purebred cattle**

Breed associations hold annual consignment sales, which make an outlet for some of the breeding cattle in the State. Breeders, however, should look upon these sales only as a show window for their cattle and expect to sell a majority of the breeding cattle at private treaty. Advertising in the agricultural publications, showing at fairs, and placing an attractive farm sign on the road at the entrance to the farm, help to get cattle before the public.

To be a good salesman is an important part of the purebred business, but even a good salesman cannot continue to sell poor cattle for good prices. On the other hand, a poor salesman with good-quality cattle may not get what his cattle are worth.

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